



# Library podcast

## Barry Lopez discusses "Horizon"

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[00:00:36] Good evening thanks so much for being here tonight. I'm Stesha Brandon the Literature and Humanities Program Manager here at The Seattle Public Library. As we begin this evening I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered together on the ancestral land of the Coast Salish people. We honor their elders past and present and thank them for their stewardship of this land. Welcome to this evening's event with Barry Lopez and Tom Keough presented in partnership with Elliott Bay Book Company. Thank you to our author series sponsor Gary Kunis and to the Seattle Times for generous promotional support of library programs. Finally we are grateful to The Seattle Public Library Foundation private gifts to the foundation from thousands of donors help the library provide free programs and services that touch the lives of everyone in our community. So it's to library foundation donors here with us tonight. We thank you very much for your support. Now without further ado I'm delighted to welcome Rick Simonson from Elliott Bay Book Company who will introduce tonight's program.

[00:01:50] Thank you Stesha and thank you all very much for being here.

[00:01:55] Between 1981 and 2004 Barry Lopez came to Seattle to read from books he wrote and also sometimes was part of. We were recounting a little bit because there were probably about 10 or 11 books he wrote. But there were projects such as an anthology of U.S. and Soviet writers when it was the Soviet Union undertaken around the time of the Goodwill Games and there was this great pairing of writers so Barry would come to Seattle from his home up the Mackenzie River east of Eugene for these occasions in fact the very first occasion in 1981. He came up by Greyhound bus. This was not this was before book tours were happening and it was a little before his book of stories winter count came out because that came out in 1981. But in that kind of sense of community and support the Copper Canyon Press which was having a financial crisis is this not so much because of book sales but the daughter of the press's co-founders Sam Hamill had broken a leg and this is they had no money to pay medical bills so Barry came up to help raise money and there's a reading in L.A. Bay literally one of the very first times we ever had a reading at the store before any of the way that the readings there would get set up happened. But that for us began a genuine relationship with this

writer who even then had written such you know defining books as of and men. Those early books of stories of giving birth to *Sunder Sleeping* with his daughter *Desert Notes* river notes and and then where else the work began.

[00:03:35] And certainly one of those early early visits that occasioned truly memorable book and night was in 1986 when his majestic book *Arctic Dreams* imagination and desire in a northern landscape was published and the place you could tell everyone there that night knew that book was something and that book would go on to win the National Book Award and and became has become and still is very much an enduring major work. Looking at the ways that the North is and and it certainly reads even now in this time 30 years after it was published as this kind of foretelling of what what the polar areas are going through with with the climate with climate change that we have cause to happen. There have been other books over the years since but then most recently was in 2004 one of Berry's books of stories *Resistance* which along with *Late Action* in the Caribbean and some the other books of stories and collections of essays had been coming along all through this. There had been this book he had he had agreed to undertake in the wake of *Arctic Dreams* which I don't even know if I had a title for a long time but we would hear about it. We'd certainly talked to our friends in York publishing where we're at. Where is it and how is it coming. And this book then that he is here for tonight whose title is simply and powerfully and beautifully *Horizon* is a book that is these over 30 years of writing and living a book that is reflective of various travels in the world from the Oregon coast to the at the Arctic to the Galapagos to the Antarctic to East equatorial East Africa and and then a few other places that are that are touched on.

[00:05:34] I'm giving you this very glossed sort of gliding over but among the things this book does is very particular lies particularized those places each place is fixed its location on this planet is fixed and and these are from visits of a certain time and the writing now includes even more reflection than comes from his brilliant observations his care and respect for those he is among the people he's among whether they're scientists whether they're Indigenous people living in a place dealing with outsiders or others who who are there. He's a careful and respectful traveler. And this shows in a writing that meditates quite beautifully and profoundly on what we've been doing in the world and what our lives are and and the relationship of landscape and and these things that are bigger than any one of us both individually and then as a society societally and again there's this kind of care and respect through that through the writing. So tonight we were talking as is this is instead of these books every two years this book is a 35 year book. And so whatever it gets set about it tonight and various reading and in conversation he and Tom Keough have I will tell you that the book is one of those ones that bears a wonderful like more than one reading but a slow reading.

[00:07:04] When you do it because there's this there's so much in it. One of the other things about Barry's work an example is the influence he's had on many other younger writers and as well as his peers among them Robert McFarlane who probably of that of the generation younger than Barry is among those writing most powerfully of landscape. He's a British writer who's done a series of books and has had a remarkable one called *Underlined* coming later this year. But Robert McFarlane just reviewed this book in *Horizon* and in the *Guardian* and talks about how it does. A decade after the book was out I'm thinking who wouldn't have read the book by 1997. But for him as a as a young man

he first encountered Arctic Dreams in 1997 up here on the British Columbia coast. He was up there and said reading it changed his life. And if you can change a writer like Robert McFarlane's life and work that loan is something remarkable. So as you'll note when you read Robert McFarlane's work so with that we're going to shortly I also want to say that Tom Keel who has a piece on buried in the sail times I think in print this weekend but it's online now will be up here for burial.

[00:08:18] He has been writing about arts and and music for sale times for about 20 years and did write for this Yale weekly before. And he's someone who I know also wanted to write this piece about Barry in this book. So when you get that that's also coming into it when the reading and the talk is done Barry will be at this table to sign books and we're going to ask for various reasons including you know time and energy if you have more than two books to wait. We'll see. Barry can do. He's certainly signed the new book. But if we know it's been some years since he's been here so some of you may have the body of work since people do read read these books all these books are actually all around. I mean there still are the books of stories in the books of essays about this life all still. Get bought read these. I see you know with the weather whether it editions around. And so there's I understand that we'll see we'll we'll get and we'll make everything we'll get signed sooner or later but we'll see how we do for tonight. And again you'll get to visit and Greek Berry which is its own good thing. It's a gift. So that again for everyone at the elite Bay Book Company and for sale Public Library. We thank you for being here. And now Ashley please join in welcoming back the very necessary extraordinary writer Barry Lopez as Trix said.

[00:09:48] I love coming to Seattle and I was away and quiet for a while because I wanted this book to have a reverberation like Arctic Dreams had and took me a while. Well I had to grow up and I had to see much more of the world than than I had seen.

[00:10:12] One of the things that I've always enjoyed doing with nonfiction is saying thank you to the people who opened doors for me and who supported me in one way or another while I was working. I look forward as you can I think only understand that if you've written a book I look forward to my acknowledgments section and remain terrified that I will hear from somebody who says what about me.

[00:10:51] So it's early in the game but I'm sure those orders will show up.

[00:10:56] The work stretched out over about 30 years so I could easily have forgotten something.

[00:11:06] My wife the writer Deborah Courtney is here tonight. She's going to read it.

[00:11:09] Elliott Bay tomorrow and I want us to single her out. There's a kind of pro forma thing in books and in the world we live in. To thank your spouse or to thank your children. And I did the best I could.

[00:11:28] In the acknowledgements but I think not quite enough.

[00:11:35] I got a terminal cancer diagnosis about five years ago and part of the reason that I'm in this room tonight is because when I was thinking what Deborah was taking notes from the doctor and she's the one that's kept us on the road over all that time. So I want to publicly thank my spouse because I would not be able to put this book together without her love and her support and her intelligence.

[00:12:16] So part of editing the book was getting rid of about 35 quotes at the start of the book and that kind of Moby Dick sort of way remember that you know when is the book stirred. So eventually I got the ones that made it through into the text of the book and I just left it at that one. So this is the single quote at the beginning of the book to travel above all

[00:12:48] Is to change one's skin. That's Saunders you a southern male.

[00:12:58] I don't think we're constrained tonight but I have on many occasions in the past week trying to figure out a way to present this book that was fair to it and didn't take very long. I did not succeed. So what I want to do tonight is just read you the short prologue at the beginning of the book which sets up the frame in which everything that develops afterward is supposed to come to life. I guess uppermost in my mind when I was writing this book was that Hell is coming.

[00:13:43] You can call it global climate change or the fatal disintegration of the democracy in the United States.

[00:13:53] There are lots of ways to approach it. All of you have probably longer and more eloquent lists than mine but all of us see this see this storm coming and that was that was always in my mind. As Rick said I picked places that I had traveled to in the past and some of them I went back repeatedly and visited Antarctica and Australia and Galapagos whole spring to mind right away. But I had no interest in writing a travel log. My interest was in going back and looking at what I had looked at before and seeing if there had been any growth in me of compassion or empathy with things different from myself could I find and celebrate those things. And could I do what I always try to do which is to be in service to the reader who did not get to go to many other places and a very fortunate life that I've been able to go to repeatedly so when I outline the book it was those five chapters on a small island an archeological dig in the very far north on Ellesmere Island and from there to Galapagos and then to East Africa and then Australia ending in Antarctica. What I wanted to do was start in this place and then make this movement around the equator and end up down here. All the while arguing against the top the bottom of the world and pretty much I hope trying to destroy hierarchies of evaluation for geography. This is a kind of smart alec thing to say too short and too disrespectful to the movements but I think there is a way in which to see the women's movement the environmental movement the Native American movement all of them as reactions against the odiousness of hierarchy when you set up hierarchies you create disaster for whoever it is that's at the bottom rung of the ladder.

[00:16:19] And so my small effort is part of the effort to get rid of the ladders to look at each other and know we have common cause if we're ever going to get out of this thing alive. If our children are going

to thrive we really have to begin developing policy that is based on something that has not yet happened and that is we will no longer operate socially or psychologically driven by what we think some of us are righteous hierarchies that somehow men are better for example or somehow primitive tribes as they are called don't have something both esoteric and incredibly insightful to say about our social dilemmas when I finished that outline I knew it had to do two more things.

[00:17:09] One is to establish an autobiographical section that told you who this person was who was doing all of this or hoping to do all of this. And the other was to take the larger themes of the book and give them to the narrator to let us know where are we going. And I don't mean Galapagos where are we going.

[00:17:36] And then I realized I had to write a short prologue to to set everything up.

[00:17:43] So this is that short prologue the boy and I are leaning over a steel railing staring into the sea. The sun is bright but shade from a roof above us makes it possible to see clearly into the depths to observe quivering there what's left of the superstructure of a battleship sunk 72 years before my grandson is 9. I am in my Sixty eighth year the memorial terrorists on which we are standing alongside. My wife has been erected above the remains of the USS Arizona a six hundred eight foot Pennsylvania class battleship overwhelmed at its moorings on the morning of December 7th 1941 by Japanese dive bombers it sank in minutes the flooded Hulk a necropolis ever since holds the remains of many of the 1000 177 sailors and marines killed or drowned on the ship that morning I'm explaining to the boy that sometimes we do this to each other harm each other on this scale. He knows about September 11th 2001 but he's not yet heard. I think of Dresden while the Western Front. Perhaps not even in TDM or Hiroshima. I won't tell him today about those other hellfire days.

[00:19:21] He's too young. It would be inconsiderate cruel actually pointedly to fill him in later that morning the three of us snorkel together on a coral reef.

[00:19:34] We watched schools of tropical fish bolt furloughed and unfurled before us colored banners in a breeze. Then we have. Then we have lunch by a pool at the hotel where we were guests. The boy swims tirelessly in the pools glittering are quite tinted water until his grandmother takes him down to the beach.

[00:19:58] He runs to jump into the Pacific he can't get enough of swimming.

[00:20:05] I watch him for a few minutes flinging himself into the face of wave after wave his grandmother knee deep in the surf scrutinizes him without letup. Eventually I sit down in a poolside chair with a glass of iced lemonade and begin to read a book. I've started a biography of the American writer John Steinbeck. I glance up once in a while to gaze at the Sunlight shuddering on the surface of the ocean. Or to follow flocks of sparrows as they flee the tables the hotels open air restaurant where they've been gleaning crumbs for prolonged uninterrupted minutes I also watch with a mixture of curiosity and affection. The hotel's other guests sunning on lounges around the pool or ambling past completely at ease the Clement air and the benign nature of the light disposed me

toward an accommodation with everything here different from myself when I breathe. I'm aware of a dense perfume like scent tropical flowers blooming in a nearby hedge. Is it bougainvillea the exuberance of my grandson has also enhanced the sense of tranquillity. I feel most of the guests here are Asian. I recognize in particular the distinctive cast of Japanese and Chinese faces strolling through the poolside restaurant and expensive clothes discreetly signaling a pool attendant for a towel snapping copies of the Honolulu Star Advertiser to straighten the pages. They all seem to have the bearing of people familiar with luxury as I imagine that state I return to the autobiography in the paragraph I'm reading the writer is describing a meeting Steinbeck once had at his home in Pacific Grove California with the historian of mythology Joseph Campbell.

[00:22:08] The night before this Steinbeck the composer John Cage Campbell Steinbeck's first wife Carole and a few others had all enjoyed dinner together in the Steinbeck home. Campbell was now has now come out onto the patio to inform his host that he has fallen in love with Carol he accuses Steinbeck of treating her shabbily and says that if he won't change his ways the knee. Campbell is prepared to ask Carol to marry him and to return with her to New York look up abruptly from the book recalling that I'd been in summer camp in 1956 with both of Steinbeck's sons Tom and John. It had been a memorable encounter for me. I was 11 and I met their father at the same time. I marveled at the burly Reeve fixation of this person who'd written the Red Pony I was introduced to his third wife Elaine. Then she was cool dismissive I pick up again where I've left off. Keen to follows this unanticipated triumph for Steinbeck John Cage Joseph Campbell pages later I am feeling the Westerling sun burning hot on my right cheek. Another tight flock of sparrows hurtles by my head and suddenly I wonder whether I'd done something. Absolutely I'd done absolutely the wrong thing that morning at Pearl Harbor before we'd all gone sorry before we'd all gone to see the Arizona.

[00:23:47] I'd walked my grandson through the interior of a World War Two American submarine explaining the architecture the periscope and the conning tower the forward torpedo tubes.

[00:23:59] He had touched the sleek torpedoes gingerly a lingering caress his small hands cupping the warheads Justin a handsome Japanese woman striding along the pool's edge makes a graceful asking dive into the water. An impulsive act a scream of water rises around her like the flare of a flamenco dancers skirt the pool water shatters into translucent translucent gems in the beauty of this moment.

[00:24:33] I suddenly feel the question what will happen to us I stand up.

[00:24:41] A finger marking my place in the book in search the breaking surf beyond a hedge of sea grape for my grandson. He waves hysterically at me smiling from the slope of a wave here.

[00:24:53] Grandpa what is going to happen to all of us now in a time of militant factions of daily violence. I want to thank the woman for her exquisite dive the abandon and grace of her movement.

[00:25:13] I want to wish each stranger.

[00:25:15] I see in the chairs and lounges around me every one of them an untroubled life I want everyone here to survive what is coming so is the prologue to the book and I I wanted to sound a note of in that ironic place where the Japanese bombed the Pearl Harbor at Pearl Harbor and in December of 1941 and now that the most the biggest five star the most five star I guess hotel on Waikiki Beach Holiday Killarney is full of Japanese people and I wanted to say we really have to start thinking about what our kids are going to face and we need to be there for them with every fiber in our being everyone here knows that what's coming. As Mr. Dylan put it don't mean no one no good but we can do something about it and this is my effort. To say here's another way to look at the monster so Tom and I are gonna have a talk now.

[00:26:49] Hello everyone. The.

[00:26:53] I feel that my job here tonight is to try to help explain or define the sprawling ambition of this book a horizon. It's a pretty amazing thing. It's not only a ever changing narrative about Berry's experiences and his travels and someone running through the entire book is I think a question that is very important to you and really becomes important in most of our lives at some point which is what was all this for. Why did I why did I do this. Was there a was there a point in when Barry and I spoke a couple of weeks ago when he was good enough to let me interview him. We we talked about storytelling and how that is a way of getting what happened to me. Out to the world in a way that is of use. Well possibly. So we're gonna touch a touch on that a little bit but first I want to have you talk a little bit about one of the things that you said to me before was that a challenge writing Horizon was that there is an autobiographical element in it obviously and that that was new and different for you.

[00:28:31] So I wonder if you would address that and talk about why the first couple of chapters especially or or about your childhood in yes I had a lot of experience writing about an event a sensation animal that became intimate with and in trying to make its complexity and its beauty come alive on the page. But I always saw myself. As an intermediary and not not necessary to the story so I remember in writing Arctic Dreams that I had this image all the time of standing next to a person who would be the reader. And describing something that was out in front of us in such a way that I was pulling aside the scrim you know with giving giving you a clearer vision of what was there. But but all the time with this hand somehow is always standing on the left. I put my hand in the small of that person's back and push them forward so that their memory of the event was their own excitement their own sense of what they thought was important and memorable and that the elevation of their spirit was entirely their own. It was their conversation with the place or the animal or whatever it was I knew that the motivation for writing Horizon was you know it's kind of a silly thing to say but I could imagine grandparents saying so would you do all that for me.

[00:30:23] Why were you constantly for 40 years waving goodbye. You know there there's a Nicholas Rowe Rich who was a Russian painter he did a lot a lot of the development of scenery for the Moscow theater in the 20s and 30s and he came to the United States after that and then went off to Mongolia and to the Humala and northern India and painted. And so there is on the inside cover of the book this image of a man on a horse leaving what appears to be his home and two women standing there watching him go. And it said so much to me about the feeling of in the same moment

the guilt of leaving everybody behind and the surge in you to go and to see. So I I knew this book was not going to work. I didn't want it to work this way. I travel log of everything that that I've been fortunate enough to do you know diving into the ice in Antarctica and you know dozens of other things that most people learn are never able by the accidents of their own life to get to do those things. The thought in me always was. Nobody gets to do this. You have to pay attention and you have to tell a memorable story and you have to bring it back and give it away but in order to write this I had to say who I was and where I came from.

[00:31:59] So right after that prologue there is an autobiographical introduction because I think the reader is saying OK we're going to go to these places and it's like and we would be leaving when you know if you're gonna tell us who you are. But I felt you had to know who this person was there. Their fallibility there the fact that they often missed things which I would go back to Australia and think how could I have thought this about that when I now I think this about that. So I wanted to come to grips with myself as a writer who travelled and answered the question for myself and why did you bloody go. What did you learn. What did you find out that is of value to us as readers you need to talk about that. So I had to write an autobiographical introduction which is which is very difficult as I don't write autobiography My ideas stories. The story you couldn't remember the story but you really don't need to remember the writer the writer is not the important thing. The important thing is the relationship of the readers imagination to whatever the story is.

[00:33:21] That's where something lasting can happen. That's how a parent learns to be a parent and how to hand on to things to the people they love their children. But the writer is really nobody. And I know this is false humility. It's a dynamic you know I've spent a lot of time trying to understand what it means to be a storyteller. Much of it by talking to people who are never were never will be any part of my culture. But I wanted to know in my culture where the writer becomes a celebrity for one and for two tends to be seen as somebody really important or wise or at least intelligent maybe if you're lucky you're you do have an imagination or you do have an intelligent approach to complex problems but that's almost incidental the reader it's the readers life the readers imaginary life that's really important in this equation and it's so obscured in the United States by commerce who's the best selling author and who sold this and who won this prize and what not. It's really sort of off the trail that stuff. And I think that's especially true now where every writer has the right to say I am worried about the world. What can you offer me. Because historically going back as far as we can go to which is probably Magdalena and phase Cro Magnum people the storyteller had a special obligation and that was to sense a disturbance in the world and to come up with the appropriate story to put people at ease.

[00:35:17] That's that's the function of the storyteller and it requires requires a good relationship with language and it requires listening to what others have to say so that you can build up a sense of your own culture and what they need what they favor so to write about and write an autobiography just struck me as I was mortified by the thought because I believe who the really who who cares who you are. I need a story to survive. You know there's a book called Crow and weasel that I wrote a little bit of it's about storytelling and a character there says to these two young kids who are trying to learn how to be men in the world. She says to them at one point sometimes a person needs a story more than they need food to stay alive and I think we're living in that kind of era. So it made me very self-

conscious. But you know it. I wrote more drafts of this book than I wrote say of Arctic Dreams because it was so difficult to get it right.

[00:36:34] You were talking before about the storm that's coming and we all know what that means. And one of the things that was important to you in your travels was trying to get an answer to the question what do people need to do to survive. And when you were on archeological digs and so on and finding artifacts and things that would tell you something about those people I think you were kind of grappling with that. How how did these folks not survive. You know they disappeared from where they were after 800 years or so. Right. So I wonder if you would talk a little bit about that question of survival.

[00:37:20] Well the question for me throughout the book is Who are we and where we're going and who are we part. I thought I could I wanted to to go and spend time with the ghosts if you will of truly culture people proto proto Eskimo people. Because the question has to be how in God's name did they survive here. They had nothing in terms of material culture. Well not nothing there very little. But my God did they have heart and they had a determination to keep going across northern Canada the first human beings that thought we can do this. Looking at that horizon that loomed for them over Greenland and they did it. And when you when you are on your hands and knees in one of these dwellings that's 900 years old you you're right there with them you know because when you take the sod off the whale bone roof and you open the floor which had been an interior for nine hundred years and you bring the sunlight in and the ground starts to melt you can literally pick up a piece of bearded seal fat off the floor and eat it. I didn't always do those things you know but it did sometimes. But you feel an intimacy with these people and you ask yourself how did they do this.

[00:38:54] And then you say why aren't they here now.

[00:38:59] Where did they go an anthropologist would say by one turn and another. They became Inuit people OK. So I knew I wanted to go and look at the determination that human beings have to survive and act in very terrifying circumstances. The next chapter I'm in Galapagos and I wanted to concentrate there on the resplendent sea of the natural world in Galapagos. And I also wanted to start talking about Darwin and evolution and that evolution was not improvement evolution was change and change only. And then in in northern Kenya Richard Leakey was very accommodating and I wrote him and I said I want to go out with the men who search for hominid fossils and just be out bush with them for whatever length of time. And he said Wonderful I'll arrange that. And he did. So I searched with these Kombi men every day in the enormous heat. And here were you know we had it we had a there was a man named Wambaugh who worked with us a combat man and there were five five six. There were five combat men and myself and we had a young Turkana man who cooked for us and kept camp while we were away and we all we you know we we were talking about Nelson Mandela and we appreciated the six of us. We appreciated the irony of it and they were they were very accommodating. And I felt privileged to work beside them spend one Booth.

[00:41:00] I was thinking of the you're doing it at three degrees northern latitude. The sun comes up very fast and the world changes very quickly and it's cool evening. The blast furnace is working. It's

so predictable that we would get up at six o'clock. Not not with an alarm clock. We got up at six o'clock because at first light all of the flies are dormant. And by the time the air heats up at 6 15 they're everywhere. So unless you want flies for breakfast. Better to have breakfast at 6:00 and be done with it before the flies discovered the moisture on your lips. But one boy one morning you know he just he was a very reserved man and he just looked at me one day and he just shook his head like this. And he goes time. Time to get in the field pal. And of course I was putting on my suntan lotion and and they weren't you know. So that's the way we expressed affection for each other. So. So there we're looking for early early hominids in our line and finding some things. But I wanted to go all the way back in the dirt to the to the fossils of our ancestors. I wanted that experience. And then in Australia I wanted to look at it much more cultural things. So I started in a transport prison in Port Arthur when the Brits used to take all of their human refuse and stick it in prisons in Australia completely daft thing to do.

[00:42:54] Then I was also able to start talking about my relations with Aboriginal people. And I remember this one man I talk about this a little bit in the book in because I wondered if he would say in a succinct way what had happened here what had happened to everybody. And he said natural resource extraction happened to us coddle mining it did and it destroy it is destroying everything mining for iron ore in Western Australia. So I wanted this cultural component and the physical component and the determination of people to survive whatever they confront. And then I wanted to in the book in Antarctica which is like a tabula rasa. And you know there's a passport is useless in Antarctica there is no nationalise the only continent that's not nationalised there's nobody to give a passport to. And that seemed like the landscape in which to explore again huge chunks of time and an evolutionary change and intense camaraderie in the field and in really brutal conditions sometimes. And taking the measure of who we are and who were capable what we're capable of doing. So I wanted that big view with reference to our paleo anthropological ancestors and with constant reference to the modern day and modern people and their dreams and aspirations.

[00:44:39] One of the ways that you would travel would be to join other people and things that you did and that could be anything from joining a group of Inuit hunters hunting North wild to going to Antarctica with a team to look for meteorites. I wonder if you would talk about what the benefit is of just joining some enterprise like that and not only to meet your own ends but to be a part of something that other people are doing.

[00:45:11] I can't emphasize I can't overemphasize how important it is to be with other people. The notion of the lone traveller discovering the world and coming back to tell people about it we've seen that character you know he's he's Willy Loman is brother in Death of a salesman you know this guy comes back from Africa somebody you don't want to sit at your dinner table when you're when you're travelling with other people especially if you're a white person from middle class America you've got to be willing to stand for the butt of the joke. Because people have to have that kind of emotional latitude like one boy with his you know we're late because this White guy needs sunscreen you. But what did what you find is the what I love about it is the intensity of the love you bear each other when your physical situation is really taking every ounce of your strength out of you you know you can depend on these people you know that you are despite your different backgrounds you are bound by

love and that's what we have to learn now we we we need to learn to work with each other. These arrangements where some guys the boss like this this guy in Washington that's not that's for sure not working out. And the discussions we need to have are when we tell those people I know you think you've run everything but actually you've done a miserable job and here's our word for you leave the room because in order to figure out a way to take care of ourselves so we've got to behave just like those truly people did basic tools allegiance with each other and loving people who are not like yourself and I think that's possible I because I've seen that happen in so many places you know I went and was thinking one day that I've had in many ways a kind of privileged life I mean who gets to do what you know I'm a fanatic so that's how I got to do it but nobody gets to travel like this.

[00:47:30] And I began thinking if you're not careful you're going to end up thinking that you're somebody and that you know everything so I went to a guy named Neil Kenny Geier who runs an outfit in Portland called Mercy Corps. They work all over the world in really bad situations making sure people have shelter and water and encouragement and support. And I went to Neil and I said I need to see plight. I need to put my face into worlds that I don't see very often and understand that whatever happens they have to get through to. We have to live a life of nobody left behind. None of these cleverly disguised racist tracks that say we're going to be better off without people who were in wheelchairs or we're gonna be better off without blacks or whatever the thing is we have to see that for what it is which is is the the life of people who believe their culture is exceptional and in the end they dismiss everything that's exceptional in other cultures.

[00:48:47] So I said to Neil can you just set up a trip where I can go and do that. So he did. And I went to Lebanon and talked with a lot of people in Palestinian refugee camps and I made one pilgrimage I wanted to go to the last groves of the cedars of Lebanon which is 40 or 50 miles outside of Beirut and and touch them. And then I went to Tajikistan which is the most impoverished of the old Soviet Republics. Eighty five percent unemployment for example. And then I went to Afghanistan and I is very fortunate to know some people there and they they put me up and one day was having dinner with my host and he said you know the worst thing the Taliban did was to destroy those two Buddhas at Bamiyan and he said this was the worst thing because they were the symbol of our tolerance and these intolerant people Afghan people destroyed those Buddhas and I said you know I've been thinking about this and I'm wondering if you can you can if I can travel there with some of your security people.

[00:50:14] So he set that up and and it was a staggering vision of the kind of thing that we saw recently in New Zealand and then I went from there to Banda Aceh in northern Sumatra where this Boxing Day tsunami took out two hundred and twenty five thousand people in about 20 minutes and looked at the wreckage and looked at the efforts to recover social stability and didn't every one of those places. I saw the mother Teresa's not not famous people. But profound human beings who were who had in our idiom in the United States of people who had gotten over themselves and who were there to guide and to encourage and to support they weren't from government they weren't from any kind of business industry or something like that they were just local people neighborhood people. So when I got to Jakarta to start to fly home I phoned Deborah and said I have more faith in humanity now than I had when I got off the plane in Beirut. Even though all I've seen is destruction and pain. So

I knew that there was if you're going to say we're never going to get out of here alive. Go look at some of these places where people who were utterly hopeless did get out alive because they believed in each other.

[00:51:53] And that's at another level that's like it.

[00:52:02] It's difficult to camp but 30 below zero day after day in a camp with no heat. You learn to do it because you believe in what you're doing and you know the others are hurting and you just take care of each other. And when I when I've been in those environments I've thought that's the way to do it. Take care of each other. Do not allow someone who's fallen to stay on the ground pick up everybody and if we don't get through because we were determined to do it and leave no nobody behind then I think that's OK too rather than have a small group of people who were buying guns or building building underground shelters or something. It's not a time to set yourself apart as more worth saving than some guy you met on the street today excuse me.

[00:53:05] One of the haunting things for me about the horizon is when you were talking about being in Antarctica. Antarctica and gathering meteorites and how the weather was preventing all of your team from being able to get there. Very much so. You got what you got. And then you talk. You describe sending them those meteorites too. I can't remember what was NASA. Yeah. We can't. Right. Right. And because of agreements between various countries that have an interest in Antarctica Nobody owns them or everybody owns them. And the did the name of the lead researcher was not even associated with these things. So. What what stuck in my mind about that was what if many more things worked that way. That's right. That's right. That there was think things done in a common interest. Right. And we weren't worried about rights because we all had something right invested in this.

[00:54:15] I think it's wonderful. You know the the way you see it in an everyday environment you know searching for meteorites and certain very particular places in Antarctica is nobody keeps track of how many we found. Person by person it's all. We did this we did that we did the other thing. So in that particular trip somebody found a 68 pound meteorite the beautiful rock and I've forgotten who it was because you just look at each other and say that's not why we're here and. So it never gets it away and we recorded information meticulously with as much accuracy as we could manage but we never made a note about who it was that found it.

[00:55:10] We found you're you're very honest about yourself in those days when you were doing all that traveling and I wondered what it's like what it was like for you when you were writing the book to look back on that guy when you were in your 40s. Oh me Yeah yeah I mean there's an incident that involves I will give anything away but that involves Beethoven's Ninth. Right. All right. And you came away kind of a self-conscious a little bit of asked about. I did. I did a really wrong thing. Yeah. So when you looked back at that fellow that you were I mean what what did you think of him. I love him.

[00:55:58] He had this character I never done with a guy talk to anybody much about but I used to think of this character I called Johnny Arctic and so because I get these questions after Arctic Dreams

came out it must have been something like this. You know and you're giving a lot of credit for doing nothing but following other people who knew more than you did. And so I would call that person Johnny Arctic you know his heat if you want to come and talk to the author of Arctic Dreams I when they introduce you to Johnny Arctic and you can take it away. I looked back I said I loved that young man. He was so determined and so overwhelmed with an affection for people and respect for the reader those things are still in me. But boy could that kid. Run and jump and I can't do much of that anymore you know. So I'm trying to recast my life as in some other way so I continue to be of service but not in the way I once was.

[00:57:06] I loved to travel and to immerse myself in this this stuff that that is so human.

[00:57:18] I was a guy named pitch Schroeder who I sailed with him on a freighter from Montreal to little Cornwallis Island in the north of Canada and the Queen Elizabeth islands and we we had some rough water and things and so I was on a bridge one night talking with him and he told me that he'd started out as the captain of small trader vessels on the west coast of Africa and he described looking out over the deck with all of the little campfires burning on the deck. And how in love he was with the slow movement and the camaraderie of people that we're just trying to get from one village to another. And I thought immediately I want to I want to do that just sit and listen and take my notes and be part of an everyday human effort to go from one place to another could I look at the clock.

[00:58:24] I'd like to shift gears for a second and talk about your fiction. Your book resistance which Nic mentioned or Rick mentioned using I read that recently and it's a painful book to get through.

[00:58:42] And by that I mean it's impossible not to see yourself at least one of those stories you have in there and I've I found it not in the sense that it's a book to be avoided but it's it's a book to see a reflection of yourself at least once or twice. And so I just wanted to talk about because it's a collection of stories about people who have been damaged by things that we all know happen and they have different interpretations and different experiences of of place in their lives right.

[00:59:19] So I wonder if you would just talk about the well you know most of us can remember going to university and having women and men that were we were really strongly attracted to and believed in and then everybody went away and got a job or whatever it was. And in this series of linked stories called resistance all of these people have drifted into the arts. Most of them have. And a repressive government in the United States has determined that really they cause more trouble. Than they do good in the world and come after them. And so the book is a series of letters. Each person. Is writing to the authority that is coming after them saying no and disappearing deliberately disappearing and I have that feeling about people I went to school with who went on to work in the arts and every once in a while every once in a great while we're able to get together and affirm in each other what it is we're trying to do with our work. One of those people whom I talk about briefly in the book is the composer John Luther Adams who premiered his Pulitzer Prize winning piece called become ocean here in Seattle. We have been very close friends since 1983 and we like to get together and talk as hard as we can about what are we trying to do that is the same thing. And that friendship in some ways generated that book. And you know the book has a series of monarch prints in it by by Alan McGee

was another close friend. And I told Alan when I saw these faces at his home in Maine I said Would you please if it's all right Xerox these and send them to me there is something coming out of them that I need to dig out of myself.

[01:01:35] So he sent me those. Monroe prints and I pinned them up in my studio and I just walked by them and look at them and there was never an effort. On my part or Alan's to create illustrations for the stories they were just a group people. And somehow they in my intercourse with them they they pushed the creation of of some of those stories but I think what's important about those people is they loved what they had done in their lives. They were all wounded individuals and they were determined to keep these little campfires that we all know about that keep a sense of self and a sense of possibility going. They were all determined to do that. So here after college days you know they were back in touch saying Yeah I got that letter too. And no I'm I'm not gonna let these people anywhere near me. They loved each other. And you know that's so that's a word that's just been beaten to death by modern culture. But that's what it is that the reciprocated love with a place or with another human being is is the best protection we have against insanity. And everyone here knows what that insanity is. The the dependable is no longer dependable. You don't really have what we used to think of in the 50s or the 60s as a government. We have a well. Other people can say that better than I can but I'm so glad you brought that book up.

[01:03:19] I don't I.

[01:03:23] When this phenomenon of Horizon settles down a little bit then then I really want to go back and find out what's in my head in terms of of short stories okay.

[01:03:39] Oh we're going to turn this over to a Q and A now and I'm relinquishing this microphone too bad.

[01:03:48] Tom thank you so much.

[01:03:50] Let's give them a round of applause. Thank you so much Tom. Thank you so much.

[01:03:55] Barry as we now have time for a few questions from the audience and Nick and I have mikes and so if you will raise your hand we are going to try our best to get to as many folks as possible.

[01:04:08] And and we're going to alternate between the two of us.

[01:04:12] So who has questions nobody has questions.

[01:04:17] It's all been answered.

[01:04:19] Ok I'm going to go up here I thank you. What's your name. My name's Coley.

[01:04:30] If this is sort of a biography or your life story is there I know often that not only the landscape but the literary literature and the arts of the landscape can also be of influence and I don't know if you address that in the book. I've only owned it for about an hour now. I haven't read it but is there anybody that you can suggest that influenced your writing of this.

[01:04:55] Oh yeah. And there's there's a bibliography that that gives you access to all that information.

[01:05:04] No obviously there's some really obscure stuff that was very important to me and that tends to turn up in the text. There's also a bibliography at the at the back that what I what I wished I could have done was to write or somehow express what it was in music or what it was in painting that deepen the experience of being in these places I own I do it in one place where you know it's my habit when I go somewhere and I just happen to be in a time when the word is the Sony Walkman remember those little play. So I had a Sony Walkman and then a bunch of batteries with me and I brought a lot of cassette tapes. Some of you youngsters don't know what they are.

[01:05:55] They're gone now to some of for example.

[01:06:00] Sebelius is one of two and Ella when I was in the High Arctic because I thought he worked really hard trying with a Finnish imagination to to find a musical equivalent for the sort of mournful light that comes in the middle of the so-called 24 hour days. You know when the light actually at noon during that the weeks and months of full sunlight that light is more yellow than the night then then let's say midnight light the sun is shining bright. But you can tell it's a bluer light and it has some kind of melancholy edge to it or it encourages melancholy thinking. So I knew that Sebelius had done that and I thought if I listened to this music then a lot of what I missed will will surface and I'll be able to understand through another artist's imagination what's here that I've I've missed so I wished I could have done that saying look at this painting and listen to this music and think about this place and you know I went to my editor when we were finished and I said you know I know we are no color photographs in the book but I wanted you to see and this is so perfect that years ago a reader sent me a postcard with this photograph and I pinned it up above my desk and thank the man who sent it.

[01:07:43] And I knew I had the same destiny thing here I thought about this photograph.

[01:07:49] So I kept it up. It's a Nicholas Rowe rich image. So I said to my editor I enjoy that I know there's. She said I know what I want to do. And she turned it into an end sheet which is just a lovely thing in the book.

[01:08:06] Thanks for your question yes.

[01:08:14] I couldn't find you at first. Is it Nick. We hadn't talked to each other in about 50 years. But it's good to see you here.

[01:08:23] Nick I think you turned your mike off.

[01:08:25] You press that Nick how many switches are on the microphone.

[01:08:33] There's like four. That was a very interesting question Nick. And I think that

[01:08:43] Is it. So that was a really Zen question. Right. Many possible answers. I haven't had a chance to read the book yet but when I do I know one of the questions I will ask myself is how is this a progression or is it a progression and I'm just kind of interested in where you see this book fitting into some of your other work you've written so many books on so many different topics. What's what's the progress or what's new or what. Maybe just like the example you gave of those explorers What kept you going what kept me going through so many books or

[01:09:27] Through what kept you going through doing the book. Was there a question. Yeah I you know I've got a um I've said to students before I can teach you how to interview someone

[01:09:44] And I can teach you how to do things like letting a paragraph end on a hard consonant which separates it from the next paragraph or you could end it with an open vowel and then the next paragraph comes in much more closely and teach you those things. But I cannot teach you hunger and I cannot teach you discipline. And if you don't have those things. It's not going to work for you. I think what kept me going was. Just a tremendous hunger to address something I couldn't. I thought I couldn't do I remember and in writing Arctic Dreams I wrote the first draft in 1983 and there was a place in the opening chapter where I broke down in tears in my studio thinking How can someone as stupid as you are possibly write this ambitious book. And I got up and went to the bedroom and lay down and compose. And then I went back to it. Now here's the interesting thing that's just anecdotal information. The interesting thing is that in the second draft I broke down in the same place. And I went back and looked at it and I realized that in order to elevate the story I had to change the tense of the now up the verbs. And once I had done that I was OK. So here the the difficulty is with time. How do you get a continuous sequence when you're operating and you know when I was 43 and when I was 59 or whatever it is.

[01:11:29] So there's always something there that you haven't you haven't tried before. And I just have the you know as personality of a you know that we all have or some of us have which is I'll show you. You know it's that defiant child thing that everybody said I can't you can't do that. And then you do. But it's not to make yourself important. It's just how the quality of the the the thing inside of you that drives you to make it so that the whole. For me that I want to make something beautiful. I know all about horror. I've been in war zones I've seen people as I say in the book and someplace I've seen every commandment broken in front of me. So I know all about how bad things are and what people do to each other. But I choose to let other people describe that that to me is the easy thing to describe. The hardest thing to do is write about something that is beautiful and have it come alive for a cynical person who doesn't believe in that that believes that beauty is decorative instead of substantial without beauty everything passes away. So I think I'm very much like other writers in that way. You you you break down in tears and then you get up off the floor and you go on. Why. Because

it's important at least to you and you you will not quit making me sound like I'm pull the shirt away and see the s you know

[01:13:21] But it's just what I am and others are other things. And the important thing to remember is that everybody has the skill everybody can contribute at a crucial moment. And if we all do that and everybody works as hard as they can and stays as deep as they can in love we'll be OK we'll be OK.

[01:13:40] You'll see one miracle after another as we have another question. Up

[01:13:51] Top Hi my name is Rick.

[01:13:57] I got a little different perspective. I'm working my way through my family archives which includes letters back to the sixteen hundreds trying to understand the people. Who. Live those lives and I have a number of personal letters among family members and I know the stories and the dates you're telling your stories from direct personal experience in hardship fellowship do I have a prayer of really understanding these people from a distance of a century.

[01:14:37] We're all praying for you now.

[01:14:43] Oh you do.

[01:14:45] Isn't it wonderful that we have this way of almost asking will you believe in me. Yes. And you'll run into trouble but we're all here for you. Or if it's not these individuals in this room at this moment there will be others. And if they're not we should be ashamed.

[01:15:07] So we're waiting for your story.

[01:15:15] So we have time for maybe two more questions. Anybody on this side.

[01:15:20] I see some up top. Oh yeah. Any ladies. Thank you.

[01:15:27] Audience requests a question for milady. Any ladies. I have one over here I'll come to you and why don't you go ahead sir you have a mike.

[01:15:36] I'll be brief. Thank you very much for coming. I wanted to mention are reading group is a breeding field notes an enduring adoring the stories and you mentioned of a while back that you were thinking of finding out if you have any more short stories inside you and I wondered whether you were thinking in terms of single books or something like field notes which I know is related to one or two other books of short stories is similar titles and similar stories.

[01:16:12] I'm not thinking about anything in particular or what I'm going to do. What I will end up doing I think is looking at about 20 or 25 stories and finding out where it where's the undercurrent

whereas the whereas the the movement that will or a reader will pick up that tells them somebody actually put these stories together and eliminated others so that the book has has a wholeness to it.

[01:16:44] The difficulty for me is going to be that I haven't published a collection of stories in 19 years or well except for resistance but that's sewn together in another way. So I'm gonna have to look and see what is the relationship of these stories so that when they all come together they make something bigger and then that bigger thing will be what stays with the reader and they can reflect on individual components but it'll be a real fully articulated beautiful animal. Thank you. Sure. Thanks.

[01:17:28] All right. So I have time for one more question and I think we're gonna do that here.

[01:17:37] Hi Mr. Lopez My name is Lexie McKay. I first wanted to tell you that in the 80s I lived in San Francisco when it in the Castro where AIDS was everywhere and everyone I knew was sick and helping other people who were sicker. And that's when I read your first book that I ever found. I came across crossing open ground and it is one of the most important things personally that I have ever read and it came to me at an amazing time of fellowship and crisis in my life. So that's something that's not really a question it's just something I wanted to tell you and then I have a question and that is your last story about going to the guy that works with homeless people or people who need shelter all over the world. The guy in Portland I was surprised in that story I thought you were going to ask him to show you some things in Portland or in the United States right. You know I just started your book this this afternoon and you say early on that you know that Blake says you can see the world in a grain of sand.

[01:19:00] But you always are going away and I was just wondering if there's some reason that like it's Afghanistan that you feel like you need to go to when you want to see the dark side.

[01:19:17] Because it seems like there's a thought a dark side.

[01:19:20] That's a really good question and I'll try to give you uh as good an answer is as you gave us a question. I had some difficult things to live through when I was a child and from time to time I've wondered do you just keep going because you're running away. Is it 40 years of running away.

[01:19:54] I don't know.

[01:19:58] It is the constant travel just a frantic child. I don't think it is because when I graduated from university I went to University of Notre Dame.

[01:20:18] I got two degrees there but I went to school with people who were just like me there were no women in the classes at that time. Most all of us were Roman Catholic. We were all white. We were all middle class and as earnest as we were about the things that we studied we were pretty much all coming from the same place and talk about that a little bit in the book.

[01:20:51] I was playing a baseball game when I was a senior and the pitcher was trying to push me back from the plate. I was crowding the plate. I didn't want to show him that he could do that. So he pitched that inside pitch for me as a right handed batter and instead of moving my body I pulled my hands and the bat as close as I could to my chest and the pitch hit my senior ring and shattered the stone and my first thought was Well I got to replace that and then my second thought was no no there was something missing from this education and you should just leave that ring empty for a while until you really understand what that is.

[01:21:39] So I know whatever childhood I had I was looking for people who were not like me and I think that is where my real writing life began first with Native American people. And so joining with them. And then it really became a big one when I went to work on Of Wolves and Men and got to know you know many Eskimos in the Brooks Range. And then then it just got huge and I knew from my high powered philosophical education at the University of Notre Dame that I was dealing with different epistemology is Mencken used to call words like that out of town words.

[01:22:31] So I'm trying to I'm trying. This is such a good question and it requires a vulnerability in me that I'm I mean a little trembling here at the edge of it.

[01:22:40] But it's a good question and I think there was an innate sense in me to get away from the world that you were being given as a graduate at the University of Notre Dame in 1962 and find the other stuff which is what I did when I moved to Oregon in 1968 and then that world got bigger and bigger and bigger. You know I went to work with Desmond Tutu and I met people that were for me in the front lines of let's let's get out of this mess and do it right.

[01:23:18] So when I got diagnosed with cancer um you know I was like an ox hit in the head with a two by four. I I what not something I was expecting.

[01:23:34] And I remember walking out after we after Deborah Knight got the diagnosis and I thought I thank God that I am walking out of this building with this woman on my arm because I don't have any focus here now. I don't I don't know what's going to happen and not to put you on the spot but you were so steady on. And I knew OK OK I can be a stunned animal for a while and then I've got to fine I've got to find a way to to not give up. So because of the things that happened to me as a child I knew a lot about trauma and I knew a lot about a darkness that I wished I'd never encountered on the other hand. I'm glad I encountered it because I could go after it later in my life as a writer and help other people who've had those kinds of things in their lives. And I think cancer's the same thing that this is leading to your answer.

[01:24:42] I can't do what I used to do anymore for several reasons. Cancer being the main one. But I you know I can't get on a plane and go to Afghanistan and sleep in the dirt.

[01:24:56] I can't do that anymore so I'm I'm in that pivot place where I'm gonna find out how how seriously do I take my work and how serious am I going to be about finding a different way to get at it than traveling all over the world all the time.

[01:25:20] I don't know if I can do that. You know I'm 74 years old and now this is now this is a major challenge and we're all watching things coming at us at 100 miles an hour. I want to be there. I want to do my part. I had an image when I got that diagnosis of cancer that I was on a boat with six men. We're all at the oars were going somewhere maybe across this ocean right here and I had to ship my awe and stand up and say to the other five men I'll be back.

[01:26:02] I hope in a while not for me right now.

[01:26:08] And I send you every bit of strength I have in my body to make you strong to do what six we're doing now five have to do it do it really well. I'll find some way to come back so that's where I am now and maybe in these stories that I want to write.

[01:26:24] I'll find out what that was all about wow thank you so much.

[01:26:33] Thank you.

[01:26:36] Thanks to all of you for being here tonight. Thank you Barry. Thank you Tom. Let's give them one last round of applause before you head out into the night.

[01:26:51] Let me tell you a few things. Those of you who are here to get your book signed. We're going to have you line up at this table over here and into the children's department which is on the other side of this door. Those of you who are heading home we wish you well and you will be able to exit through the wall that's becoming a door over here. And and some staff will be around to help. Help get your names and your books soon. If I can have this nice clump of people follow Mika out into the kids department so we're not blocking the stairs that would be fantastic. Thank you all so much. Thank you everybody for being here. Thanks again to Tom Keough and to Barry. Have a wonderful evening

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